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In this attempt to view the approach to adult education in the United States, the dangers and benefits of mingling vocational and non-vocational, credit and noncredit, technical, commercial, and liberal adult education within one institution are presented. Examined also are the status of adult educators within the university, the love of organized talk, the cloaking of simple explanations in complicated and unintelligible jargon (mainly psychological and sociological), the dangers of overcompensation, the conflict between the establishment of standards and the impact of personalities, the shortness of courses, the preoccupation with securing degrees, and the question of the field as a discipline and the possible chances of integrating it with other disciplines. On the credit side are the widespread readiness to think about what one is doing, to work and cooperate, and to sacrifice and face danger; the resistance to the dangers of the system; and the attempt to orient some programs to the needs of the students and the community. (nl)

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Reality and Purpose

A Visitor's Reflections on Some Aspects of American Adult Education

K. T. ELSDON

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4819 greenwood avenue · chicago 15, illinois

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REALITY *and* PURPOSE

A Visitor's Reflections on Some Aspects *of* American Adult Education

BY

Konrad T. Elsdon

WARDEN, THE FOLK HOUSE
BRISTOL, ENGLAND

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Elsdon invaded this continent in 1956 on a whirlwind visit which carried him to adult education institutions in many parts of the United States. After his return to Great Britain, he felt impelled to set his reactions down on paper—an impulse few scholars can or do resist. He thus joins, in a more restricted field, an illustrious company which includes Mrs. Trollope, Charles Dickens, de Toqueville, and many another thoughtful and indefatigable observer of the American scene.

His report, I fear, is very likely to find the same mixed reception of his predecessors'. Were I a bolder introducer, I would have headed this brief note with "caveat" instead of a neutral "introduction." For Mr. Elsdon lays about him lustily, his candor sugarcoated occasionally by kindness and self-deprecation, but seldom enough to let us miss his point.

To be sure, most of his criticisms of American adult education have been voiced by members of our own field here; some, indeed, materialize out of the martini glasses like old ghosts every time a few adult educators get together. But some of the criticisms are fresh, because it takes an outsider to see certain problems. Mr. Elsdon's wonder, for instance, at our incessant comings and goings at meetings and conferences, to worry at the same old dilemmas, echoes many other foreign visitors, one of whom remarked that American adult educators are <u>forever</u> pulling up the flower to examine the roots.

It <u>is</u> refreshing to get new views of our achievements and problems, particularly when they are so well-written. And, you will note, Mr. Elsdon concludes by pointing out that the British have no more solved the basic problems he sets for university adult education than we have.

We think you will be interested and stimulated by his essay. If the stimulation carries you as far as your desk, with either huzzahs or mayhem in mind, we will be interested in your reactions, pass them on to Mr. Elsdon, and if there are enough of them, will be happy to circulate them as a hands-across-the-sea anthology.

Harry L. Miller
Assistant Director,
Center for the Study of Liberal
Education for Adults

REALITY AND PURPOSE

A visit to America is a unique experience for the British adult educator, and during the two months which it was my good fortune to spend in the United States this Spring I was enabled to visit some ten University Extension Divisions and University Evening Colleges and meet many times that number of colleagues. More general insight was provided by my attendance at the Leadership Workshop of the NUEA and the AUEC and by the generous help and advice of the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, as well as many individuals.

Nevertheless the visit was a short one—too short to be sure of one's impressions however strong they may be. If I am setting them down for public inspection I am doing so at the request of some of my American colleagues and with the sincere conviction that I may well be mistaken in more respects than one. Maybe there is some value, though, even in the mistakes of the outside observer. Appearances may be deceptive, but they can also point to some truths.

It seems only fair that the observer should disclose his own frame of reference, however briefly, in order to enable readers to compensate for the colour of his spectacles. Hence I shall mention briefly some of the major differences between adult education work in the United States and in England, as well as the kind of programme with which I happen to be most closely associated.

Perhaps the most obvious difference is in the scope of our institutions of higher learning, since all forms of vocational training are normally undertaken by specialist institutions rather than in the universities. This implies a total separation between the commercial and technical fields and that of liberal adult education.[1] Even in the liberal field, the education of adults who are working towards a degree is separate

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1. This is, in practice, no longer generally true or generally accepted. A growing tendency to distinguish different kinds of work rather than different student motives cannot be ignored. For my own part I feel it need not be resisted where it is possible to safeguard all the values of the work itself.

from non-degree work. In addition, work at different standards tends to be carried out by different institutions, and the universities will only deal with that portion which is appropriate to the standards of universities which select, on the basis of ability, a much smaller proportion of the population than is the case in America.

A very great deal of the comparatively elementary work done by a wide range of American adult education bodies is not organized by educational institutions in England, nor indeed is it thought of as adult education. Community centres may run discussion groups, horticultural societies lecture series, naturalists' societies, radio societies or musical and dramatic societies and similar bodies will indulge in sustained work, but they would often be astounded if it were described as adult education in their hearing, and they would intensely resent the intrusion of an educational institution which tried to organise their work for them. We have no university radio or TV stations, but a majority of our broadcast programmes might well qualify as educational if the BBC should ever be unwise enough to announce to the public that it provides adult education.

A less obvious difference, which nevertheless profoundly affects the atmosphere of our work in the liberal field in particular, lies in attitudes to degrees and diplomas. While we seem to be moving in that direction it is nevertheless true that paper qualifications do not play anywhere near as important a part in economic, academic and social life as they do in the United States—with the consequence that they are worth more at the one end of the scale, and that they do not distract teacher and student at the other.

The separation of vocational and non-vocational, credit and non-credit, high and low standards, has both advantages and disadvantages compared with the American system. It may smack of academic preciousness at one end and inverted snobbery at the other. In the upshot the range of possibilities which arise from housing all these activities under one administrative roof is that vocational work might be liberalized and liberal education corrupted or, quite simply, displaced by more lucrative disciplines. Neither of us can escape entirely from the disadvantages of our systems. But it should be pointed out that the liberalisation of vocational work is not entirely neglected in England since it is carried through, often not unsuccessfully, by the students' own informal societies, which are encouraged but never sponsored and directed by

authority. Our separation of standards is not an attempt at class distinction by intelligence quotient, but a means of safeguarding and improving the highest standards at the top, and an inducement to raise them at the bottom. Many of us would tend to believe that an educational system designed for the average and without special provision for the bright and the dull might not only retard the intelligent but level itself down to the standard of the dull. We should regard it as egalitarian because it writes out the same prescription for everybody and undemocratic because it takes no account of the gifts and needs of the individual.

Within this general frame of reference I happen to be connected with an institution which is entirely devoted to liberal and non-credit work, but which nevertheless is concerned with work of university standard and with students who are expected to do a good deal of reading and independent work in connection with their classes. It is a self-governing adult education centre in which the student must be a member to join a class, membership being open to all. The government of the centre is in the hands of democratically elected representative committees, on which representatives of the University and other educational bodies co-operating in our work also serve. Learning is thus tied up immediately with expression and responsibility within and for the community and its government ("onely add Deeds to thy knowledge answerable"), and it takes place under circumstances of frank and informal intimacy between staff and students. The centre is thus, in essence, a learning community; or, at any rate, that is the ideal it tries to embody.

To these brief notes I ought perhaps to add the personal one that I am committed to liberal adult education because I regard it as one of the most positive forces in the development of individual and society (its effects in Britain during the last fifty years have been incalculable). In my attitude within the educational field I suppose I am most at home with the humanists of the 16th and 17th centuries, with More or Colet or Milton. The process of learning seems to me to be a means of greater personal perfection beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge, and hence a means of perfecting the community which is formed by individuals. "The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents" may still be as good a way of defining it as it has been for the last three hundred years.

My blinkers and prejudices should be clear from what I have writ-

ten, and they should be allowed for where they may have dimmed my judgment.

I have already suggested the surprise with which I noted the vast variety of activities which I found describing themselves as adult education in America, and the multiplicity of interests with which adult educational institutions concern themselves. It can, of course, be argued that the whole life is instructive, that therefore the whole of adult life is adult education, and that consequently all adult activities can be rightly provided as classes. At the opposite extreme is our own, perhaps needlessly narrow, definition of what constitutes adult education. Just as the field as a whole is very widely drawn, so the vast majority of American adult education institutions provide an enormously wide range of activities for an enormously wide range of student motives. Naturally this produces problems of which Americans are likely to be much more aware than I am. Nevertheless it would be as pointless to question this state of affairs as ours. Some adult education would even take place if some members of the A.E.A.'s Council of National Organisations could learn that while their members may be adult, their work is not exactly educational—a lesson which, maybe, only membership will teach them.

While the principle itself is fixed, it is, however, relevant to ask what is likely to be the effect of this commixture of subjects, standards and motives on the teaching staffs, on programme planning and the status of subjects, on the student's approach and on his motives.

It was surprising, for instance, to find after I had heard innumerable jokes about "fly-tying classes" that the joke was based on reality and that at any rate one university provides classes—non-credit, I hasten to add—in this subject. Bridge and golf are more common subjects in the same category, and one is bound to wonder in the first instance whether such provision will not undermine the independent spirit of a community by spoon-feeding it with nourishment which can be home-grown and home-cooked with perfect ease, or be the field for independent clubs. Moreover, is there no danger that standards elsewhere may be lowered by the inclusion in an educational programme of what is hardly even peripheral to the proper function of a university? There seem to be only two major arguments in favour of the practice. One is the hope that a student once attracted to the programme by such an interest will come into contact with more genuinely educational ones, and proceed to take

them up. Our own experience is that this hardly ever happens, and that the non-educational activity may even tend to draw students away from educational ones and develop a centrifugal tendency in relation to the educational centre of the programme. It would be interesting to learn whether American experience differs here. The other argument is much more practical: pure entertainment dressed up as classes is a sure money-spinner and provides a welcome subsidy for genuinely educational activities. The question is whether its effect on the rest of the programme and the spirit of the institution is worth risking: olet aut non olet? Do we take our stand with Vespasian or Titus?

A much more important and exciting problem is that of the mingling of vocational and non-vocational, credit and non-credit, technical, commercial and liberal adult education within one institution. It involves the possibility of a much broader and more liberal understanding of their studies by all concerned in the work. One of the most profoundly impressive things to the British observer is the universal lip-service which is paid to the idea that commercial education in particular must be liberalised, that a man will be a better manager if his understanding of man, his nature and his needs is deepened. If men pay lip-service to an ideal long enough they may imperceptibly slip into living up to it, and there are examples of this kind of programme in action which are brilliantly exciting and obviously successful, such as the Institute of Executive Leadership at South Western College, Memphis, or the programme for Federal Executives at University College in Chicago. American adult education is vastly in advance in both its preaching and its practice of anything we have done in this field.

On the other hand the mere collocation of liberal and vocational courses in an institution or even in one student's programme is not necessarily effective if the two do not interpenetrate each other, or if the liberal courses are merely taken as extras to fill up the tally of credits.

There may, of course, be more positive dangers to liberal work in this rubbing of shoulders.[2] The fact that liberal adult education, where it is not in fact simply vocational training in the humanities, is mainly non-credit often affects its status. The day deans' suspicion of non-credit

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2. Indeed, the reverse may also be true, but perhaps my interest is too strongly vested in liberal adult education for me to have noticed it.

work may either reduce it or force it into the credit structure and partly or wholly defeat its purpose. Moreover, it is less likely to attract numerous classes, and where there is no financial inducement to study, the student is usually less able and willing to pay a large class fee. As a result there is often a noticeable pressure on liberal adult education from the administrator who sees it as an activity which tends to lose money and occupy space and time which might be put to more profitable use.

Above all there is the danger from this mixture of work that what was in the first instance a genuine liberal study may be corrupted by its connection with credits and that of credits with financial motives.[3] The point is that students' motives may easily affect the quality of the teaching they receive. This possibility is clearly illustrated by an example which is no doubt unusual and extreme, but which involves two reputable institutions of higher learning. Both of these were in the habit of providing classes in a certain city at a time when the public school authority of the largest city in the metropolitan area concerned announced that its teachers could qualify for salary increments by taking credits in any one of a list of subjects. Both institutions thereupon proceeded to arrange courses. One of the teachers concerned found 15 students in his class room on the first night, and rather enviously noted the enormous audience which was piling up in the lecture room next to his. On the next evening (when 11 students attended) he brought his assistant along and sent him next door to find out who was lecturing on what. It turned out that the course next door had been arranged by the rival college on the same subject and with the teachers' needs in view. The lecturer had announced on the first night that no reading or written work would be required from his students and that anyone who attended regularly would get at least a "B" for the course. This was hardly liberal adult education any longer.

The mingling of different types of subject in one institution holds great promise, and fulfils it here and there. But this fulfilment can only come from the right emphasis on liberal and humane values, from firm conviction that the status of subjects is not to be decided according to profit or prestige, and from unfailing moral and financial support

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3. This process is not by any means unavoidable, but it can only be avoided by continual watchfulness.

for those studies which are considered worthwhile, however unprofitable they may be.

The wide variety of functions undertaken by the American university and by its adult educators is, presumably, one major reason for its large size. It is not uncommon to hear deans of extension divisions or evening colleges talking about five-figure student bodies without batting an eyelid. This has enormous advantages. It enables the university to afford a large and efficient administration for adult education purposes and spreads overheads sufficiently to give our American colleagues physical facilities and staffs which we could not envisage in our wildest dreams. On the other hand such a vast organisation requires—or is, in most universities, thought to require—a powerful full-time administration. As a result there is a tendency for adult education to be run as a business by an administrator and his staff. He may once have been a scholar and a teacher, but very often he is so no longer, and he is busy with administration rather than scholarship, with accounts and statistics rather than teaching staff and students. One of the evils of size is that there is a great gulf fixed between administrators and scholars and often also between scholars and students. In the latter case the lack of personal contact may be partly due to tradition, but it is certainly emphasized by the size and the short duration of classes. These problems can be overcome where the good will exists, but for too many administrators the student exists only statistically. Their criteria in planning and programming will too often tend to be administrative or financial—if only because their duties have removed them from intimate contact with the soil they are trying to cultivate. It is a mistake to think that dust bowls are an impossibility in the field of adult education.

The administrator is, of course, a victim rather than the villain of the piece. As often as not he is under considerable pressure from a university administration which may well force him to try and increase the size, turnover and income of his department at all costs. In any case he must at least balance his budget and this almost necessarily prevents him from balancing his programme. And no conclusive argument for the necessity of balance in an adult education programme can be produced. But it is necessary to be sure whether one wants it or not, whether teachers and students are the better for being concerned in a balanced and complete educational organism, or whether the total context is of no par-

ticular significance for individual students and teachers.

These dangers appear to be realised comparatively rarely and size and turnover are almost invariably regarded as major virtues of a programme. But here, as everywhere, there are exceptions which not merely solve the problem but point out new directions and possibilities for a wider field. One of them is UCLA's system, where each group of subjects is looked after by a programme administrator who is not a full time administrator, but an active scholar and teacher on the faculty of his particular department. His appointment is a joint one from his own department and the Extension Division. The result of this is that the administration is in the hands of people who are qualified to administer an educational programme and have their ears to the ground rather than to the calculating machine. Moreover, it resolves at the same time the problem of the isolation of the adult educator from the work which goes on inside the university, and keeps him in intimate touch with productive scholarship while he follows his task of sharing it with a wider public.

The status of the adult educator is often affected by the size and the financial strength of his division, and the status of the division may often depend on the status within the university of its head. This is, of course, a vicious circle which is bound to influence the men who are caught up in it, as well as their work. There are many obvious exceptions, including such extremes as Deans of enormous and profitable divisions who are virtually powerless, and others who manage only just to keep their comparatively small divisions above water, but whose calibre (and that of their work) is such that they enjoy a great deal of status and power within their universities. But one's immediate and general impression is one of insecurity, despite the exceptions. The dean appears so often to be, or believe himself to be, caught between the upper millstone of the university administration demanding money and numbers regardless of standards, and the nether one of the day faculty who look down, or appear to look down, on his work, with varying degrees of justification.

As an outsider one can only note these facts without being able to judge how far adult educators are still correct in thinking of themselves as a depressed class which produces only the occasional success who may bask in the sunshine of academic equality. In any case what matters in this case is the attitude and its effects, rather than the experience it-

self. But the effects are noticeable enough in the shape of other attitudes and practices which look very much like compensation of this feeling of insecurity. There are such things as an immense love of statistics and accounts, of conferences, workshops and every conceivable form of organised talk, and all the mutual comfort and encouragement which they provide. Above all one is struck by the highly theoretical attitudes and the incessant spinning of esoteric theories to cover, explain or explain away simple experiences or habits, the popularity of complicated and unintelligible jargon (mainly psychological and sociological) where simple words would be clearer, and the confusion which leads to the equation of the simple survey and the labelling of simple facts in Greco-Roman jargon, with research. This in its turn leads to the creation and pursuit of higher degrees in adult education as the reward for such surveys or labellings. It appears to the outsider that such practices can be explained only as attempts to compensate for academic insecurity by trying to do the same things as the day divisions in the same way, "only more so." One hopes that the day divisions will not take them seriously, because they can hardly raise the status of adult education.

It is well known that the borderline between compensation and over-compensation is tenuous, and it seems to me that over-compensation does occur and produce two well-marked types whom I have not met in the adult education field elsewhere, but which <u>seem</u> to be immensely influential in America. They might be called (I am not immune to the lust for labels) the tycoon and the impresario. The tycoon builds up a purely quantitative success by shrewd business methods (or with large means put at his disposal), and gets a great deal of personal power and status in the process—commodities which appear to be greatly sought after in American education. His success proves to him that his educational methods are the right ones, and can and should therefore be applied universally.

The impresario owes his power and influence to the fact that he has (or acquires) such elegant fingers that other people beg him to stick them into their pies. He may or may not be a man of ideas, but he is certainly a man of enormous influence. Impresarios are very important. But for them the circus might never come to town. But they are not as funny as the clowns or the dancing giraffe, nor are they quite as unselfish. On the whole they look a greater danger to genuine values in adult

education than the tycoons, if only because they are so often taken for adult educators in their own right.

Status should, in fact, be related to standards rather than personal power, however acquired. It would seem that the major criteria by which standards in adult education can be judged are service to the community and service to the individual. It seems a little odd to find theorists so entrenched as to necessitate an article from Dean McGhee's pen[4] to point out that the two are closely interrelated, and that better and wiser individuals can make a better and wiser community, while on the other hand it is not always possible to send a whole community to school. In places and countries where it has proved possible the results have not invariably proved pleasant.

On the issue of usefulness to the community the judgment of almost anyone is bound to be too subjective to be worth having. The number of bodies in the community which are served by a university is no criterion in itself; such service may be sound or unsound, it may be abused or it may transform a community. The experience of a number of townships in Washington State is eminent proof of the high standard which may be achieved by a university serving the community direct, but it is not impossible for equally direct and enthusiastic service to the community to be of a kind and standard which is a discredit to the servant and a disgrace to communities whose judgment is blinded by the trademark of the service.

Standards of service to the individual are a little easier to determine, because on the one hand they might be strictly academic ones; on the other they involve the effect of academic ones on his personality. If we know our students personally we can judge these effects easily enough. Nevertheless it appears that American adult educators are especially worried about academic standards. They want "fixed standards and criteria" and "written definitions of what our standards are." One is surprised by the frequency with which these demands are heard. Yet the attempts to supply the want are almost invariably concerned with definitions not indeed of academic standards of work at all, but with the setting up of minimum requirements of degrees to be held by teachers and of

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4. "Adult Education and Community Action," Adult Education, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1956.

the number of hours the students must spend sitting in the lecture rooms. One is bound to wonder if here there is another attempt to compensate for insecurity or increase personal status, rather than a true search for standards. Can intellectual standards really be guaranteed by an instructor's degrees or the toughness of the skin in a particular part of the student's anatomy?

Obviously this is only one side of the picture. The other is triumphantly revealed in places like the Division of General Education at New York University, where a strong tradition of genuine and responsible scholarship among the faculty is known to be the best guarantee of academic standards. Where such a tradition of high quality is firmly established, even non-credit work does not appear to agitate the day deans, and standards are realised to be something which refers to the work itself rather than to externals.

Of course the standard of what happens in any form of university adult education anywhere depends very largely on what happens inside the universities. What happens inside the universities again depends to a much greater extent than we like to admit on what happens inside the schools. Goodness knows what happens there. The main point is that one cannot talk about standards in American adult education in isolation any more than one can talk about them in ours. If anything it would be even harder, and I have neither the space nor the knowledge required for the purpose. There are, of course, very considerable differences in working methods and standards for comparable age groups in the two countries; but facile comparisons between the academic standards of the American high schools or the undergraduate work of American universities, and their equivalents in Britain, are completely beside the point. The high school appears to be primarily a catalyst of social cohesion; and the undergraduate schools share this function to some extent, while doing the comparatively elementary academic work which had to make room in high school for social adjustment activities which, under the particular circumstances of American society, are of greater importance. The functions which these superficially analogous bodies perform in the two countries differ in many respects, and purely academic standards cannot therefore form the sole basis of comparison. The only reason for mentioning the differences is that the content and standards of adult education are bound to be affected by those of the schools and the

universities' internal work.

There is, however, one difference which profoundly affects much of the work, although it may well be based on social and economic conditions rather than academic ones. This is the immense pressure on the adult student to acquire degrees, diplomas, certificates or any other kind of paper qualifications to improve his economic and social position. Where so many require degrees the standard is bound to be lowered. The degrees themselves undergo a gradual process of devaluation because, however carefully the conditions under which they are acquired are controlled, they are not an absolute guarantee of standard. Where students are busy acquiring the credits they need for the next rung on their professional ladder or their next salary increase they can hardly concern themselves with high level study for its own sake. When they have achieved their aims they may well have ceased to have any further interest in study of any kind. This is clearly borne out by experience as well as by comments, such as some of those recorded in Dr. Baltzell's article on the Bell Experiment.[5]

Naturally I cannot speak from general experience in this matter, nor can I judge vocational or credit work except in my own subject field with any degree of confidence. What little I have seen there would appear to bear out the impressions which I gathered from rather closer observation in the field of liberal and non-credit work. In any case, however, it seems to me that the nature of academic standards is not, or should not be, affected by the question whether classes are means to an end or ends in themselves.

An immediate impression on the British visitor is the surprising shortness of virtually all the courses offered. Maybe we have made a fetish of the long course. There is no doubt that the intensive specialised short course designed for those who already have some knowledge in the subject field can be of a very high standard indeed. But a short course which covers a vast field is not likely to achieve a high standard. It can only scratch the surface of a subject. A long succession of short courses, even if it extends over a number of years and is conceived according to a general plan, will merely scratch a wider surface area than a single short course. There seems to be a virtual absence of thor-

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5. Harper's Magazine, March, 1955.

ough work on particular subjects or problems in the liberal field. Naturally adult education even more than any other should avoid narrow specialisation. But one is bound to doubt if valuable general ideas and understanding can arise from superficiality in the particular, when the experience of the whole of Western civilisation has been that general conclusions can only be reached from particular instances. There are no short cuts to plenary inspiration even for the adult student.

Many of my American colleagues maintained that longer and more thorough courses which do not lead to qualifications and material benefits would never attract students from the general public. This assumption seemed frightening, and it is triumphantly countered by the experience of more than one university, and by such new experiments even in the educational backwoods as the classes which Dr. Clyde Henson has been conducting from Michigan State University. It is exciting to know that this work is being expanded, and that here and elsewhere the scholar's confidence in his countrymen's sense of values has been justified.

In the face of such successes the standard of many of the lay discussion groups sponsored by national foundations seems depressing. The field which they cover in a very short time is invariably enormous, and thorough study of any of its aspects is impossible in that time, nor does it appear to be encouraged to the extent of many students being aware of the possibility. Where the material studied is scanty and incomplete and the leader of the group has no qualifications in the subject or subjects, there is a persistent danger that the group will lead to no more than a pooling of ignorance on a substratum of misinformation. It is well known that up to two or three members of many groups are usually led by their experience to do some further reading in one or other of the subjects covered, but there is no guidance for them and in any case it is by then too late for their reading to benefit the group. The numerous enquiries I made from members of such groups did not convince me that the discussion of a few extracts in prepared texts leads to genuine education. A member of a group which had been studying "An Introduction to the Humanities" told me somewhat wistfully that at least she knew now where our ideas came from; the only trouble was that these courses didn't lead to a proper understanding of what the ideas were.

The prepared materials, such as they are, are often competent or better. But they appear, at times, to be shaped in such a way as to lead

the lay group to particular conclusions as well as understandings. The conclusions are invariably highly respectable—but does not the process itself suggest something which, in its less genteel forms, is normally called indoctrination?

It is good to know that a good many adult educators are awake to these problems, and are devising imaginative and practical solutions. More than one university which sponsors the courses makes a habit of overcoming their impersonal mass-production methods by not merely bringing them up to date where this is required, but by adapting them to the local needs of each individual group which is enrolled, and by creating contact with faculty members. The idea of the independent and self-governing, responsible group is brilliant; it deserves to be carried out on the highest possible level, and Dr. Abbott Kaplan's survey will no doubt lead to ways of achieving this. In the meantime, U.C.L.A.'s intention to train young scholars not to lecture but to act as a combination of discussion leader and resource person adumbrates a highly positive way out of the difficulty.

Such possibilities may not, of course, exist everywhere, since institutions of higher learning cannot be available or within reach of every place where a lay discussion group meets. Nevertheless this seems a doubtful argument for the sacrifice of quality and standards to achieve a wide distribution. Where no professional scholars are available to play the part contemplated at U.C.L.A., librarians or high school teachers with some specialist qualifications in the subject under review could no doubt be found and persuaded to act as discussion leaders. In such ways the vital democratic virtues of independence and responsibility can be safeguarded and, at the same time, employed on a worthy intellectual level.

If adult education is to be worthy of its aims and traditions, if it is to do for the student what it sets out to do for him, it cannot tolerate the cheap and the easy in its field. It can achieve its aims only by issuing genuine challenges and making real demands in order to liberate—or drag out—the best in the student. The easy or superficial course will hold back the gifted and implant false values in the average. A challenging course led, as a discussion group or seminar, by a competent scholar can run on a front so broad that both the gifted and the average student can gain and contribute to their mutual advantage.

Academic standards are not the only ones; indeed they have already got inextricably mixed up with others in what I have written so far. But the highly formal conduct (lectures followed, sometimes, by a few brief questions and answers) of a large proportion even of the non-credit work, and the tendency of the prepared materials for some of the groups to lead to one kind of conclusion which the student cannot check because his studies were not sufficiently detailed, raises a host of problems. What place is there for the individual in the adult education field; how much importance do we attach to his needs; is individual responsibility fostered; what is being done about the problem of democracy in educational administration?

A crass example, perhaps unique, will illustrate the kind of thing I have in mind. A certain adult education institution (not a university this time) is govered by a self-appointed and self-perpetuating committee which decides on the programme, appoints teachers, makes all decisions of every conceivable kind, is not responsible to anyone and does not publish its accounts. There is an informal student organization which holds occasional socials but has no other function. The president of the institution—an obviously worthy and immensely public-spirited man—kindly took me along to a meeting of the committee. At this most of the time was spent in firmly resisting the suggestion of the chairman of the students' organisation, who had been invited at his request for this occasion, that the students should be represented on the committee and share in the responsibility of governing this voluntary organisation. As we left the meeting the president warmly grasped my arm and said proudly, "Here you have seen democracy in action."

Needless to say there is no connection between learning and training for individual responsibility in such an organisation. The question is how much responsibility for government, for the choice of teaching staff, for the shaping of programmes, is passed to the students in other institutions. In what proportion of classes does the teaching consist of the delivery of a lecture, followed possibly by some questions and answers? How many classes are there where the student is given the responsibility of working independently, and the lecturer sees his function as a combination of discussion leader and resource person among equals? How often does the teacher know each of his students individually, and weld his class into a team which he guides but on which he does not impose himself?

In the technical and commercial field, programme building is often closely related to student need through the administration's contact with firms and professional bodies. But in the liberal field such co-operation is only possible where individual students are known to the administration and may even be officially consulted through elected representatives or in some other way. Ties of this kind exist in some cases, and result in work which has a standard and a personal atmosphere peculiar to itself. The University of Washington's Bureau of Community Development is one instance and New York University another. But more often one tends to find a programme and an approach impersonally imposed from above.

To some extent counselling services can act as a bridge between administrators and teachers on the one hand and students on the other. They do so eminently well where, as at Syracuse University College, the counsellors make a point of meeting all students at regular intervals from the start, and are themselves immersed in the teaching process as well. As a result they can influence the type and quality of relationship which other teachers establish with their students, and create the right sort of personal relationships throughout the class programme. On the other hand the counselling service may simply be another branch of the administration which comes into action merely for the purpose of make do and mend when a particular student has got into personal or academic trouble. It may well be that a counselling service is unnecessary to an institution which insists that the faculty should know and care for each of their students personally. A student's own teacher is his first and best counsellor. The rare occasions when skilled psychiatric help is required can be picked out easily enough by such teachers.

Of course the kind of class atmosphere and teacher-student relationship which produces the best results is not easily obtained where the class is so large and the course so short that the teacher cannot get to know his students individually. There are obvious physical obstacles to it as well. One is the common practice of faculty members who neither arrive early to welcome their students nor stay late to listen to them and who, in between, take up the whole of the time with their formal lecture. Another is the lecture room which is set out formally with all seats facing the lecturer. This gives to his desk the authority of the pulpit and discourages discussion because students are much less willing to engage

in it if they cannot see each other's faces. This in its turn tends to create a two-way traffic between teacher and individual students instead of the wide spread of genuine discussion.

There appear to be few instances of students having their own responsible organisations through which they can widen their personal contacts beyond their particular subject and class, and undertake not merely social but creative activities. For one thing such activities as are more particularly suitable for this purpose (such as sports and games, drama, opera, debating, literary or musical or scientific societies and many more) and can be planned and controlled by the students themselves, tend to be "laid on" from above and controlled by the administration, with a faculty member to teach the activity. Another opportunity to foster democratic responsibility is thus lost, and a potential contact between faculty, administration and students broken.

A phrase which appears to be in frequent use is "the need to change people." Whether students want to be changed is another matter. But the phrase illustrates an attitude on the part of some adult educators: they want to do things to people rather than with people. They could create a democratic society in which people whose academic experience differs in both quantity and quality strive together for more and deeper knowledge, a process in which the teacher must be equally ready to be changed. Instead they erect a purely egalitarian caste system in which all are equal, but the faculty are more equal than the students and the administration more equal still than the faculty. No wonder if the evaluation of classes becomes a problem, when there is no close personal contact and visitation between administrators, teachers, classes and individual students.

This state of affairs is surprising in view of the amazing degree of genuine egalitarianism among faculty members, which is such a delightful and fruitful feature of many extension divisions and evening colleges, and which often leads to genuine democracy in the evolution of policy. The regular and frequent faculty meetings, with their atmosphere of free and easy discussion among equals, are an enviable feature. The regular bringing together of a group of colleagues to engage in sincere and honest attempts at thinking about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it should be done is one of the most valuable experiences I had during my visit. More than once it gave me a lively impression of a whole

faculty working together as a genuine team. Moreover, the realisation that the possession of a higher degree does not automatically qualify a man to teach adults has penetrated much further than in Britain. Perhaps training methods are sometimes oddly remote from practical reality, but the idea itself is healthy and its results enviable.

The faculty meetings, and the energetic attempts at teacher training, are typical of a spirit which appears to be widespread in university adult education in America, and which is immensely exhilarating: it is an egalitarian spirit which results in an admirable openness to new ideas, a readiness to learn and try out new techniques even on the part of those whose positions on the ladder would exempt them from the pressures of authority. There is a widespread readiness to think, and think hard about what one is doing, and a recognition of problems with which one can deal oneself, not some person or authority or change in the economic situation, but oneself in person, by hard work and thinking and co-operation and sheer enthusiasm, even if it costs considerable effort or even sacrifice or, worse, the occasional failure. It was wonderful to see so many adult education institutions which, in case of doubt, did not invariably play safe.

One feels that the great virtues, the most impressive programmes and individual pieces of work, are rooted above all in this readiness to think—unconventionally if necessary—and then to adventure and take risks. Only from such an attitude could spring great and exciting successes like the ones which I feel I must mention here. The readiness of Dr. Henson and his colleagues at M.S.U. to share with the population of an educationally underprivileged district their own work at a graduate level and to do it in the shape of informal non-credit discussion classes must be rare or unique in American adult education, however familiar this kind of work is to the British adult educator. But I know of no British equivalent of programmes such as the one Dr. Barton operates for federal executives at the University College of Chicago, the Bell experiment, or the Institute of Executive Leadership which Dr. Davis and Dr. Kenney have set up at Southwestern College in Memphis. One cannot help but feel that such ventures may transform the attitudes of business and administration and have untold effects on society as their influence spreads. Members of the Memphis Institute (the fact that one thinks of members rather than students is an index of the pervading atmosphere)

spoke to me with enthusiasm of the way in which their studies and their teamwork with scholars had transformed their personal lives. They were sure, too, that they had become better executives. One could not help but feel that they must also have become better employers. The system of combining a sustained course and a good many hours' study and class work in each week with continuance at work seemed especially fruitful. It appeared to enable members to relate their work and their practical experience very quickly and closely to their studies, rather than keeping the two in separate compartments except when encouraged to do a particular piece of integrative thinking.

One cannot help being deeply impressed or, indeed, moved at finding that even a very large adult education institution can be intimate and personal in its approach and need not be a machine. Where even the top administrators are active scholars and teachers, are on the premises every evening for the express purpose of getting to know students and doing their own counselling, where informal but creative student activities are encouraged in every way and a faculty member who is both an administrator and a teacher is available in the common room every evening in order to try and create a welcoming atmosphere—in such a place great things are bound to happen. What is more, if such a context is created for a liberal and largely non-credit programme of a high standard, the example is bound to spread throughout the ranks of faculty and students. There cannot be many university adult education programmes which could not profit from the practice of New York University in these respects, and a visitor working in the same field can only express his gratitude for what he has been privileged to see.

Less capable of general application because it deals with particular problems, but equally important and exciting to the visitor is the pioneering work (in more than one sense of the word) of Washington State University's Bureau of Community Development. Here as elsewhere the personal factors are central. But one cannot help feeling that, apart from the highly imaginative (as well as practical) conception of the work there are above all two factors which contribute to its special quality. One is the very high standard of work which is exacted. The other consists in the fact that each scheme is democratically governed and the responsibility not merely for administration but for the acquisition of the necessary knowledge is imposed squarely on the individual members of the

community, with the University providing a guide rather than a teacher or leader.

It is not surprising that genuinely liberal—and non-credit—educational work appears to be growing in the wake of such community service, and that it seems likely to take the same form. The toughness of the demands which are here made on the "students" calls forth the best from them and produces astonishing results.

What I have related are only a few facets and impressions. I am told that I have seen a reasonable cross section of American university adult education, but cross sections are notoriously lacking in depth. One is almost afraid of praising, in case, by chance or ignorance, one has missed equally admirable features elsewhere. One certainly does not wish to give chapter and verse for what one criticises—if only because such criticism may be based on misunderstanding, misinformation, prejudice, or sheer cussedness. Yet a few critical generalisations may perhaps be risked with the proviso that deeper knowledge might lead to willing withdrawal.

One such generalisation is that American adult education suffers badly from its concentration on credits, degrees and diplomas. This is, of course, partly forced upon it from outside, but one is bound to wonder whether it could not be resisted more forcefully rather than, as in some places, being welcomed. For one thing it tends to encourage the preoccupation with adult education as a field of study and an additional happy hunting ground for higher degrees or credits towards them. Adult education is primarily a process and not an academic discipline, like physics. Neither is it a product to be sold anyhow in the largest possible quantities, like pills or automobiles. The achievement of its end depends on the quality of the process. We adult educators have set up as shepherds for better or for worse, and should foresee the consequences when we give stones to the hungry sheep whom we have trained to look up to us. Millions of students and thousands of study groups will do more harm than good if the work we offer them is of a poor standard. It seems right to give people always a little more than they are capable of receiving, and demand from them a little more than they can yet give. There is no greater insult to a nation than that of setting its educational sights too low, and then disowning it by setting the adult teacher apart instead of making him the team-mate of his students.

There seems thus too often to be a tendency to achieve the concept of life-long learning by spreading the learning so thin that it takes a lifetime to acquire a little of it, and a little learning is no less dangerous because Pope's line has become a platitude. Liberal education for adults in particular should be and, at its best is, a profound experience for both teacher and student. In the last resort the subject studied is no more than the vehicle of this experience. But it cannot become such a vehicle unless study is deep, thorough, reasonably extended and involving the individual's own resources.

That means that to be a good adult educator a man should have something to teach, a subject of his own about which he really knows something, a care for people as individuals, and a fire in his belly. I do not mean vague enthusiasm for Mankind or The Community. Swift, who in his own way was a very great adult educator, once wrote that he had "ever hated all nations, professions, and communities" but "heartily love(d) John, Peter, Thomas and so forth." The necessary technical skills of teaching and administration can be acquired through practice by most intelligent people. What we need to look out for in adult education is the genuine scholar who cares for John, Peter, Thomas and so forth rather than the technician-administrator.

An adult educator, then, should be a genuine and productive scholar in the subject he proposes to teach, and productiveness in this sense is a matter of intellectual and imaginative activity shared with colleagues and students rather than the quantity of printer's ink spilt over reams of virgin paper. Research in the field of adult education by such a man would be worth having, but it seems questionable whether research in adult education is the adult educator's best initial training for his primarily catalytic function. In any case the amount of genuine research, as opposed to the collection labelling and mystification of facts, which can be done in the adult education field is minute.

All the psychological studies of group processes in the world cannot give an intending teacher the sympathy for men and women as individuals which enables him to enter upon them, care for them, and share himself and his subject with them in such a way that the individuals become a group and grow richer themselves in the common pursuit. A survey of the administrative methods of a group of adult education organisations may be useful to their heads, but will not make the "researcher" a

better scholar or teacher in any sense which will interest his future students. He should be both if he is to be an effective educational administrator in a more than purely materialistic sense. Why should we regard people with such a training as more capable of running an adult education programme than an advertising agent is of running his customer's factory?

It is of course very much easier to criticise than to appreciate if one has only caught the hurried visitor's fleeting glimpses. Moreover, the criticism may be unreliable. But it rests on the conviction that the focus of adult education is in the two-way traffic borne by sincere intellectual and imaginative endeavour between men and women of differing experience. I am not sure that a system which often tends to put the focus in the formal lecture technique—in being present, in reading the prescribed extracts, in regurgitating the lectures accurately at examination time ("We but teach Bloody instructions which, being taught, return To plague the inventor")—that such a system will perform its functions as effectively as one which stresses individual responsibility and study and group discussion under a teacher who is able to guide individual and group without imposing himself.

It is the adoption, or movement towards, this approach which impressed me so much in the work of New York University, at the University of Washington, or in that immensely alert class of Dean John Dyer's which he was generous enough to lend me one night at Tulane, not to mention other places named before or nameless. Surely adult education in the best sense is to be found here rather than in the dreary hunting after enough credits to buy a salary increase. My hope for American adult education would be more of this kind of work and a severe "credit squeeze," just as I should like to see more of the American adventurous spirit in our own liberal adult education, and a pretty large-scale adoption of the more liberal approach in our vocational work.

Some of our problems and failures are very diverse, but we share a good many of them though their symptoms may differ. Where many American adult educators seem to be trying to invent problems for theoretical research and solution (in print of course) we tend to be so preoccupied with "cultivating our gardens" that we do not think enough about the why and how and wherefore of our work in the field. In our concentration on standards we may have paid too little attention to possibilities of

spreading academic influence to humbler forms of adult education. But the greatest of all our problems is one we share, even though it may be difficult to unearth it.

One does not normally need to ask the American adult educator any more than his colleagues elsewhere what his problems are. They come tumbling out as soon as the hatch is raised. Perhaps our readiness to discuss our problems indicates not only the comparative youthfulness of our work and institutions, but also a special quality about it. Ideas—even truth itself and our search for it—affect us powerfully. But there are times when the best of us are tired or lazy and count the world of ideas well lost for our personal mess of pottage. Let us confess it—an adult educator is only a man (or woman). But he finds himself saddled with the task of a colossus as he bestrides both the world of ideas and that nagging and impatient one of man which is quite unsaleable. As workers in the field we neglect either world at our peril, and yet are so easily tempted to neglect both for the interests and demands of administration. Ask an English adult educator what his problems are and, as often as not, he will begin with money and continue with lack of staff. His American counterpart will begin with money, too, and may continue with parking space or elevators.

I suspect that neither of us has put first things first. Our major problem is that our choice of vocation faces us, perhaps more squarely than some other professionals, with what Whitehead called the impracticability of purpose. An adult educator's flesh is no less like grass than that of other men. We have chosen a profession which imposes on us not one duty but a complicated contrapuntal score of them. We must be scholars, men of ideas, and we must be these things in contact with and in the service of our students who are, each one of them, individual human beings with their own particular claim on us. On this ground bass we must play our never ending series of administrative variations. If any one of the parts fails there is discord. We may not be aware of it, or we may never have realised that the ground bass is more essential than the administrative variations. But our work will inevitably reveal our insensitiveness or our ignorance. Perhaps an adult educator's—any adult educator's—major problem is his own inevitable insufficiency for the task he has set himself, and his major need a conscience which will keep him aware of it and spur him to ever-renewed raids into the territory of the impossible.

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